

North Africa

Politics, Region, and the Limits of
Transformation

Edited by
Yahia H. Zoubir and
Haizam Amirah-Fernández

Foreword by
William B. Quandt



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4 Mauritania

Between the Hammer of Economic Globalization and the Anvil of Multiparty Factionalism

Mohameden Ould-Mey

Mauritania's military coups and attempted coups made headlines in 1978, 1979, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1987, 2003, 2004, and 2005. After 1991, contested multiparty elections added more to the overall image and reality of Mauritania's political instability, erratic geopolitics, and widespread poverty. In the wake of the December 1984 military coup, the Mauritanian government embarked on an International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank-backed structural adjustment program. The program was part of a broader development strategy conceived by the G7 countries in response to the economic crisis of the 1970s, which developed out of a fundamental contradiction between nationalist policies (adopted by most developing countries at the time) and the G7-supported neo-liberal economic policies. In 1991, the Mauritanian government also embarked on a French-backed democratization process. This process was initiated after the end of the first US-led Gulf War and on the eve of the official dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. These policies contributed to what has been conceptualized and analyzed as the denationalization of the Mauritanian state, the devaluation of its economy, and the fragmentation of its sociopolitical system.¹

Drawing upon the above analytical perspective, this chapter summarizes and critiques selected geopolitical economy developments in Mauritania in the areas of state sovereignty, economic liberalization, political democratization, and geopolitical positioning. The concept of geopolitical economy refers to an eclectic synthesis of the national political economy and international geopolitics and argues that inter-state struggle has often been more significant in world history than intra-state struggle.² First, the chapter briefly explains the concept of denationalization and gives examples illustrating the shift from a national to a multilateral state in Mauritania. Second, it examines the impact of currency devaluation on the US dollar value of Mauritania's national production. Third, it assesses Mauritania's process of democratization in light of the fluctuation between contested elections and military coups amid increased multiparty factionalism. Fourth, it attempts to pinpoint the delicate geopolitical positioning of Mauritania in the context of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Western

Sahara conflict, the controversial relations with Israel, and the active collaboration in the US-led "war on terror." It concludes by suggesting that any serious tackling of the challenges facing the country may require going beyond "representative democracy" to a form of "direct democracy" involving direct popular participation in the complex processes of defining policies, enacting laws, and allocating resources.

Denationalization and the Shift from a National to a Multilateral State

The denationalization of the state has been conceptualized and articulated as a shift from a national state, which strives to adapt its external relations to the imperatives of its internal structures, to a multilateral state, which attempts to adapt its internal structures to the imperatives of its external relations.³ In other words,

some state capacities are transferred to a growing number of panregional, plurinational, or international bodies with a widening range of powers; others are devolved to restructured local or regional levels of governance in the national state; and yet others are being usurped by emerging horizontal networks of power—local and regional—that bypass central states and connect localities or regions in several nations.⁴

This strategy appears to provide a solution to the tension between the increasingly global nature of the economy and the persistently local and national character of politics. A denationalized state has less control over the formulation of its development strategies, the choices of its foreign policies, and the tenets of its national sovereignty. In this context, the *UN Human Development Report 2002* (subtitled *Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*) observed that, even in countries with well-established democratic institutions, citizens and their governments often feel powerless to influence national policies because of international forces beyond their control. US State Department Director for Policy Planning, Stephen Krasner, went even further to suggest that powerful states should "share" sovereignty with "failed, failing, and post-conflict countries."⁵

The following two examples illustrate how the denationalization of the Mauritanian state started at the nerve-center of economic planning and foreign policy. First, the Mauritanian state began to lose sovereignty over the diagnosis of development problems, the formulation of development policies, and the assessment of policy output as early as January 1979, when the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) prepared a Country Development Strategy Statement (CDSS) for Mauritania and launched the Rural Assessment and Manpower Surveys (RAMS) project, which criticized Mauritania's nationalist policies and advocated economic liberalization. The 44 RAMS reports provided Mauritanian policy makers

and academicians with a *prêt-à-porter* neo-liberal analysis of the economy combined with an American functionalist approach to society, emphasizing descriptive ethnography over other social theories (see the carefully selected titles of the two major RAMS studies of sociological profiles: *Les Maures* and *La Mauritanie Nègro-Africaine*).⁶ Since then Mauritania's national plans of economic development were progressively superseded by World Bank and IMF Policy Framework Papers (PFPs), which commit the government to implement development strategies focused on managing demand and strengthening supply via a matrix of policy measures.⁷ Today, this policy continues unabated. According to the IMF Staff Report for the 2006 Article IV Consultation, the Mauritanian authorities have by now "implemented an impressive policy shift toward transparency and good governance and have resolved the data issues."⁸

Second, the Mauritanian state realigned itself with the State of Israel despite popular opposition. This realignment began in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, when Mauritania broke relations with Iraq and established ties with Israel in order to improve relations with the US government. In November 1995, the foreign ministers of Israel, Mauritania, and Spain met in Barcelona and decided that Spain would represent Israeli interests in Mauritania through its embassy in Nouakchott and Mauritanian interests in Israel through its embassy in Tel Aviv. In May 1996, Mauritania opened a diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv. By the same token and under the banner of combating terrorism and normalizing relations with Israel, Mauritania and Jordan (both countries with no access to the Mediterranean) joined NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, which includes Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, whereas other Mediterranean countries, such as Lebanon, Libya, and Syria, were excluded.

In its relations with Israel, Mauritania has been and continues to be influenced by a long list of Arab and Muslim governments' normalizations with Israel and "Zionism."⁹ The list includes: the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement in 1979; the upgrading of Turkish-Israeli relations in 1991; the signing of the Palestinian-Israeli Declaration of Principles in 1993; the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty in 1994; the opening of an Israeli liaison office in Morocco in 1994; the opening of Israeli trade representation or interest offices in Oman, Qatar, and Tunisia in 1996; the meetings of Pakistani-Israeli foreign ministers as well as Indonesian-Israeli foreign ministers in 2005; the beginning of Saudi-Israeli trade relations via the US and the World Trade Organization (WTO); and the forerunner decision by Bahrain to end the boycott of Israeli goods because that is one condition of a free trade agreement with the United States.¹⁰ However, Mauritania had no declared domestic or regional interest when its foreign minister was dispatched to the US State Department's ballroom in Washington DC in October 1999 to sign an agreement establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel and to become the third Arab country (after Egypt and Jordan) to do so, despite strong opposition at home and

criticism abroad. Since then, Mauritanian-Israeli relations have moved on a fast track because Mauritanian policy makers believed that normalization with Israel was a *sine qua non* condition for normalization with the United States.¹¹

In April 2000, shortly after the first shipment of fish from Mauritania reportedly arrived in Israel, a delegation of the Israeli Knesset visited Mauritania, and an Israeli-Mauritanian Friendship Society was reportedly established. Israeli Knesset member Naomi Chazan (Meretz), who was accompanied by Maxim Levy (One Israel), Gideon Ezra (Likud), and Hashem Mahameed (United Arab List), called the visit "historic for Israel and the Arab world."¹² After the outbreak of the Palestinian Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, Morocco and Tunisia closed their representations in Israel, and Oman closed Israel's trade representation office. Mauritania, however, did not sever ties with Israel and sent foreign affairs minister Dah Ould Abdi on a visit to Israel in May 2001, and the Mauritanian ambassador in Tel Aviv attended Israel's celebration of its May 2002 Independence Day, which the Egyptian and Jordanian ambassadors boycotted.

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and foreign minister Shimon Peres visited Mauritania in October 2002 in the aftermath of the bloody Israeli attacks on the Palestinian cities of Jenin and Nablus in April. In May 2005, Tunisian-born Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom visited Mauritania and called the visit "the road map for relations between the Arab world and Israel," while Mauritanian President Maaouiya Ould Taya asked for "Israel's assistance in getting a little attention for his country in Washington."¹³ Since the coup on 3 August 2005, Mauritanian officials have reiterated that Mauritania will keep its relations with Israel. In an interview on Al-Jazeera TV Channel (13 October 2006), the new Mauritanian leader, Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, declared that he would have established relations with Israel as his predecessor Ould Taya did because, he argued, the Palestinians, the Egyptians, and the Jordanians accepted a peaceful settlement with Israel.¹⁴ But a closer look indicates that the US did use its bilateral assistance programs, leverage over loans from international financial institutions, and annual country reports on human rights to engage or pressure Mauritania to recognize Israel.¹⁵ This policy may or may not continue under President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. *Voice of America's West African Bureau* in Dakar noted that "Of almost 20 candidates in the recent presidential election, Mr. Abdallahi was the most moderate in his views on Israel."¹⁶ However, Ould Abdallahi declared that Mauritania's relationship with Israel will be determined in consultation with the Parliament, civil society, and various state institutions. In light of such consultations, he added, we will make our decision of "freezing, severing, or continuing" relations with the State of Israel.¹⁷ The situation seems so serious that he had even hinted at holding a popular referendum on Mauritania's relations with Israel.¹⁸ What makes this a catch-22 situation is the fact that Mauritania normalized with Israel in order to normalize with the United

States and the United States normalized with Mauritania because Mauritania normalized with Israel.¹⁹

Currency Devaluation or the Devaluation of National Production

The pillars of the Mauritanian economy consist of the agro-pastoral sector and the export sectors of iron ore, fish, and, recently, oil. The agro-pastoral sector supplies the country with meat, while exporting an unknown quantity of its livestock to neighboring countries. This sector is vulnerable to recurrent drought and locust plagues, which, according to the July 2005 report of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, affected 26 percent of the population in 2004. Some limited attempts to export agro-pastoral products have demonstrated that Northern countries' markets are less accessible to Southern countries' exports than the other way around. This is exemplified by the case of Nancy Abeid Arahmane, who reportedly campaigned for over a decade without success in exporting pasteurized camel cheese from her Tivisky dairy in Mauritania to the European Union, due to EU trade regulations.²⁰ The huge popping of NGOs in every country, the emergence of more than 200 regional trade agreements over the past two decades, and the calls for "regional regroupings" have further exposed the limits of the denationalized state in the age of globalization.²¹ In the meantime, Mauritania is not a member of any of the 26 most frequently cited Regional Trading Agreements in 2005.²² The map of the world today is increasingly dominated not by nation-states but by geopolitical and economic organizations like the European Union, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the South American Community of Nations, and the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Mauritania has extensive deposits of iron ore which were initially exploited by *Mines de Fer de Mauritanie* (MIFERMA), a French-led multinational mining company, whose infrastructure included a 650 km railroad, the longest trains in the world, a mining town (Zouerat) and its exporting port (Nouadhibou). MIFERMA was nationalized in 1974, renamed *Société Nationale Minière de Mauritanie* (SNIM), and later denationalized and opened to international capital through a mining project (Guelb Project) which aimed at replacing the depleted site of high-grade ores (64 percent Fe) in the Kedia site (near Zouerat) with the larger but lower-grade ores (38 percent Fe) of the Guelbs site 30 km north of Zouerat.

In addition to iron ore, which has been exported at around 11 million tons per year, the Atlantic coast of Mauritania is adjacent to some of the richest fishing grounds in the world. In 2002, benefiting from a fishing protocol with the EU that provides some 86m euros per year, the fishing sector, whose potential output was estimated at 630,000 tons, generated 45 percent of foreign currency earnings, 25 percent of the government budget and 12

percent of GDP, and created 36 percent of the jobs in the modern sector.²³ The UN Environmental Program, however, has warned about the devastation of over-fishing by foreign fleets, saying that catches of Mauritania's octopus have been reduced by half in four years, sawfish has completely disappeared, and the number of traditional octopus fishermen has fallen from about 5,000 in 1996 to about 1,800 in 2002.²⁴

In 2001, oil was discovered 90 km off the shore of Mauritania, southwest of Nouakchott, by the Australian company Woodside Petroleum, whose production from the Chinguetti oil field (in 800m of water) began in February 2006, with a projected peak production of 75,000 barrels a day. Based on expected production rates and current prices, Woodside has predicted that average revenue flowing to the Mauritanian Government over the first five years of production from the Chingetti oil field will be around USD 300m a year.²⁵ There are other promising offshore oil and gas fields, such as the Tiof and Banda fields. Mauritania has also awarded onshore Taoudenni blocks in the northeast deserts of the country to several oil companies.²⁶ According to the World Bank's Country Brief, proven and probable oil reserves in Mauritania amount to around 310 million barrels.²⁷ The discovery of offshore oil and the completion of the highway between the capital city of Nouakchott and the northern port city of Nouadhibou are raising expectations and are likely to have a significant impact on European tourism and African worker migration.²⁸ While some have argued that oil "impedes" democracy due to the effect of "rent,"²⁹ it remains to be seen whether or not this will apply to Mauritania since the "trickle-down" of oil revenues has just begun. But resource endowment is not a sufficient enough condition for economic prosperity, because politics often determine economics and resource control is often more important than resource quantity or location. In addition, the value of Mauritania's export earnings has been systematically eroded by the impact of currency depreciation and devaluation under the IMF and World Bank-backed adjustment programs.

The IMF and the World Bank have loaned large sums of money to Mauritania. The World Bank boasts that, as of January 2005, it approved 69 credits and grants for Mauritania reaching a total of USD 1.02bn.³⁰ Between April 1985 and July 2002, the Paris Club arranged eight debt reschedulings and treated over USD 1bn of Mauritania's debt, of which USD 518m were fully repaid during the first six reschedulings. In exchange for loans, policy measures and implementation deadlines are detailed in a series of PFPs. A typical PFP can include over 100 policy measures aimed generally at reducing total demand through an austerity program involving an exchange rate policy that almost always depreciates or devalues the national currency, the ouguiya (UM). For example, to implement one policy measure ("further liberalize the exchange rate system to promote external competitiveness") out of 124 required under the PFP for the 1999-2002 period, the Mauritanian government had to implement 13 detailed measures including the adoption of a new method for the calculation of the

weekly official exchange rate.³¹ Between 1980 (USD 1 = UM 45.91) and 2004 (USD 1 = UM 272) the ouguiya has depreciated by 592 percent. The depreciation of the ouguiya *vis-à-vis* the US dollar means that more units (i.e. more units of iron ore, or fish, or more recently oil) of the ouguiya are needed in a given year to import the equivalent of the previous year's imports. Since increasing exports is not always an option, reducing imports and/or contracting more foreign debts would be the logical consequence of currency devaluation.³²

When both population growth and inflation are taken into consideration, Mauritania's GDP per capita (measured according to the World Bank Atlas method) has declined from USD 497 in 1980 to USD 174 (USD 400 market prices) in 2004, while external debt per capita in 2000 reached nearly USD 1,000. The World Bank's updated Mauritania Brief of March 2007 estimates that current oil reserves could bring Mauritania's GNI (gross national income) per capita from USD 420 in 2004 to around USD 1,000 in 2010. According to Mohamed Ould El-Abed, minister of economic affairs and development, the rate of economic growth for 2006 reached 11.7 percent. But despite this apparent economic growth, a couple of examples might illustrate the overall devaluation of Mauritania's purchasing power in the global market. In 1990, a lecturer at the University of Nouakchott received a net monthly remuneration of UM 40,000 (USD 500 at the 1990 exchange rate: USD 1 = UM 80). In 2000 (after a 50 percent salary raise), the same lecturer received a net monthly earning of about UM 60,000 (USD 240 at the 2000 exchange rate: USD 1 = UM 250). Due to currency devaluation and despite the 50 percent salary raise, the purchasing power of the lecturer (as measured in US dollars) has actually declined by 52 percent. With expected improvement of the economic situation following debt cancellation and new revenues from oil production, the government has recently proposed 50 percent increase in public and private employees' salaries and 20 percent increase in retirement pensions beginning in January 2006.³³ But it should be noted that the above salary increase may not necessarily translate into a real increase in purchasing power, given the continuous devaluation and depreciation of the national currency, as indicated by the April 2007 exchange rate of the ouguiya: USD 1 = UM 281. In this regard, the IMF has announced Mauritania's commitment to more of the same monetary policies: "The transition government has achieved important progress in structural reform. Key steps included the passing of an ordinance that will increase central bank autonomy in the conduct of monetary policy, and the successful launching of the foreign exchange market in January 2007."³⁴

Also between 1987 and 2001, consumer price indexes for foodstuffs and lodging in Nouakchott reached 288 percent and 271 percent respectively. Such increases in consumer price indexes were never fully offset by commensurate salary and wage raises. The resulting resource transfer to the global North and severe poverty in the global South were implicitly recognized by the IMF and the World Bank, when the "Policy Framework

Paper" was renamed "Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper" (PRSP).³⁵ They were also acknowledged by the G8 when they agreed, in July 2005, to cancel most debts of the 18 heavily indebted countries, including Mauritania. They could be seen in the short life expectancy at birth in Mauritania, estimated by the 2006 UN Human Development Report at 53.1 years. The 2005 UN Report on the World Social Situation (subtitled "The Inequality Predicament") and the debates at the 2005 World Summit have acknowledged that poverty widens the gap between the "haves" and the "have nots," threatens developing democracies, and breeds violence and terror. While the IMF Country Report No. 07/40 sounds optimistic and considers that poverty in Mauritania fell from 56.6 percent in 1990 to 54.3 percent in 1996, 51 percent in 2000, and 46.7 percent in 2004, it also provides a less optimistic assessment of the first poverty action plan for 2001-4:

It must be observed that implementation of the first phase of the PRSP was not very satisfactory inasmuch as more than one third of the actions called for were not carried out and many actions were taken that did not contribute directly to meeting PRSP objectives. In this context, the growth rates recorded were below forecast levels (4.6 percent on average for the period, as compared to the anticipated 6 percent) and inflation exceeded forecasts, largely owing to the poor fiscal and monetary policies pursued on the basis of imprecise data. The economic policies followed resulted in an extremely high fiscal deficit (9.9 percent of GDP over the period), the collapse of official reserves (ranging from 0.4 to 1.3 months of non-oil imports), and an unprecedented increase in the money supply.³⁶

Political Democratization or Multiparty Factionalism

The 2002 *UN Human Development Report* focused on the global progress of democracy. During the prior two decades, 140 of the world's nearly 200 countries held multiparty elections, and 33 military regimes were replaced by civilian governments. However, the Report noted that despite the hope and enthusiasm about democratization worldwide, there is a sense that democracy has not kept its promises and that it is actually being undermined. In most African countries, multiparty democracy came after a decade of structural adjustment programs and after the collapse of single-party rule in the Soviet Union in 1991.³⁷ While African opposition parties welcomed multiparty democracy, there were genuine concerns about its imposition from the outside and its potential centrifugal implications on national unity and social cohesion in the most politically fragmented and culturally diverse region of the world (the African Union includes over 50 nation-states, and Africa south of the Sahara has over 1,000 mostly non-written languages). In a sense, the coming of the military coup of August 2005 after 15 years of multiparty democracy in Mauritania confirms the

2002 UN Human Development Report's concern and disappointment about the democratization process.

Effective pressure for "democratization" in Mauritania came mainly from the international community of lenders and donors, especially France and the United States. In the US Congress, Thomas Lantos (Democrat from California) and John E. Porter (Republican from Illinois) managed to pass a Congressional motion on human rights violations in Mauritania, which was published in the 1991 Congressional report entitled *Human Rights in the Maghreb and Mauritania* (the title even questions Mauritania's membership in the Maghreb).³⁸ Though they expressed some concerns about the ethnic clashes during the 1989 border crisis between Mauritania and Senegal, they were in reality concerned mostly about Mauritania's verbal opposition to Israel and to the 1991 US-led war against Iraq. US pressure, however, stopped, and the two Congressmen kept quiet about human rights abuses under the Ould Taya government as soon as Mauritania began establishing ties with Israel. It was also in 1991 that Thomas Lantos (dubbed "the only" Jewish Holocaust survivor in the US Congress) used his Congressional Human Rights Caucus to foster the infamous "Nurse Nayirah hoax" (a completely fabricated story like the Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction hoax"), which consolidated public and congressional approval for the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq.³⁹

By the same token, Thomas Lantos led the introduction of the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006 to Congress following the democratic victory of Hamas (Arabic acronym of *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*, or Islamic Resistance Movement) in the January 2006 Palestinian legislative elections.⁴⁰ The Act stipulates that it shall be the policy of the United States "to urge members of the international community to avoid contact with and refrain from supporting the terrorist organization Hamas until it agrees to recognize Israel, renounce violence, disarm, and accept prior agreements, including the Roadmap." The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee has warned about the aim of this Act, which stipulates that failure to meet some "congressionally defined democracy qualifiers" would end US assistance to the Palestinians, prohibit Palestinian diplomats entry to the United States, designate Palestinian territories as a terrorist sanctuary, and reduce US-based contributions to money spent on UN Palestinian bodies. This Act caused and continues to cause a great deal of human suffering in the Palestinian territories. These examples demonstrate that Thomas Lantos was concerned with Israel's security and Arab normalization with Israel, not with human rights or democracy in Mauritania or Kuwait.

The French were more efficient in bringing about multiparty democracy through quiet diplomacy. They dispatched foreign minister Roland Dumas to Nouakchott in April 1991, and he apparently persuaded the president of the Military Committee for National Salvation, Colonel Ould Taya, that he had nothing to fear and perhaps a lot to gain from the multiparty system. Ten days after Dumas' visit, Ould Taya announced his intention to hold a

constitutional referendum, open the political system, legalize political parties, and give freedom to the press. The process began with the July 1991 constitution, which proclaimed "attachment to Islam and to the principles of democracy." However, the constitution accorded near despotic powers to the President of the Republic (Articles 28 to 43). The democratization process culminated in April 1992 with highly contested elections involving four presidential candidates. Colonel Ould Taya reportedly obtained 62.7 percent of the votes, Ahmed Ould Daddah (former minister of finance and half-brother of the first Mauritanian president, Mokhtar Ould Daddah) obtained 32.8 percent, and the remaining 4.5 percent was shared by Moustapha Ould Mohamed Salek (a retired army colonel and former president of the Military Committee of National Salvation that staged the coup against President Mokhtar Ould Daddah in 1978) and Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Mah (a Nouakchott University professor of economics and former mayor of Nouakchott).⁴¹

While the elections made Mauritania more credible in the eyes of its international financial benefactors, they also drove a wedge between the government and the opposition parties. Political factionalism along party, ethnic, Islamic, and tribal identities intensified to the extent that no unified or coordinated national policy or strategy could be identified and agreed upon. The number of recognized political parties increased from one in 1978, to 18 in 1993, and to 24 in 2005, about 30 when counting the banned parties. Marianne Marty argues that democratization in Mauritania was further undermined by the neopatrimonial nature of the political regime and its manipulation of ethnic and tribal divisions through control of state resources.⁴² In the face of the factionalism and impotence of political parties, serious and organized opposition within the military establishment became increasingly visible in June 2003 with an attempted coup. Its leader, former army Major Saleh Ould Hanenna, and his companions from the *fursan et-teghyir* (Knights of Change) organization admitted in court that they had wanted to end the Ould Taya regime. Overall, the constitution of 1991 and its multiparty democracy raised expectations before opening the door wide to political disappointment. People witnessed purges against various political factions (Islamist, Arab Nationalist, Negro-African, or Liberal), while Article 13 of the constitution reads: "All forms of moral or physical violence shall be proscribed." People witnessed the erosion of sovereignty over economic and foreign policies, while Article 2 of the constitution reads "The people shall be the source of all power," and "No partial or total surrender of sovereignty may be decided without the consent of the people." Under these critical circumstances of legitimacy and security crises, people began to lose faith in words and look for deeds at a time when the state was largely reduced to its repressive and relatively oversized security apparatus.

The political impasse must have encouraged the 20-year Director of the National Security, Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, and the Commander

of the Presidential Guard, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, and other military officers to mobilize on 3 August 2005 and overthrow President Ould Taya, who was out of the country attending the funeral of Saudi Arabia's King Fahd. They announced the establishment of the Military Council for Justice and Democracy (MCDJ) to put an end to "the despotic practices" of the regime and create favorable circumstances for an "open and transparent" democracy. In his first public address, a month after the bloodless coup, the President of the MCDJ, Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, declared a welcomed amnesty to "all Mauritians found guilty of political crimes or offences." However, the amnesty did not include all the detained Islamists, since it excludes the so-called Salafists, who continue to be jailed without trial as of April 2007.⁴³ The MCDJ also decreed that all its members and those of the new cabinet are barred from running for the legislative and presidential elections. Whatever the real motives and intentions of the MCDJ, one can argue that the recurrent coup attempts⁴⁴ by the military and the repeatedly disputing of elections by opposition parties indicate that the process of multiparty democracy has failed, not just Ould Taya or his party. But this failure does not seem to be acknowledged by Mauritania's Eurocentric political elites. It does not seem to encourage any serious critical thinking "outside the box" of representative democracy and its multiparty divisive technique. This seems to leave the door open for the vicious cycle of cliquish military committees (who often lack the required political theory and vision) and factious political parties (who often lack the necessary unity and strength) to start again from square one.

The transition from military to civilian rule began soon after the military coup and the dissolution of the national assembly in August 2005. It progressed through the national referendum on constitutional amendments in June 2006, the election of *el-majlis el-watani* (the 95-member National Assembly) in November and December 2006, the election of *majlis esh-shuyukh* (the 56-member Senate) in January and February 2007, and the presidential election in March 2007. It was complete with the inauguration on 19 April 2007 of President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. He defeated ex-opposition leader Ahmed Ould Daddah by a narrow 52.85 to 47.15 percent (24.79 to 20.68 percent in the first round) margin in a run-off from the 11 March presidential elections, in which 19 candidates vied for the presidency. Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, who was elected for a five-year term (with eligibility for a second consecutive term), collected 373,519 out of 706,703 votes cast by 1,132,176 registered voters.⁴⁵ He had a lead over his rival in 10 of the 13 provinces and obtained more than 70 percent of the votes cast in two provinces: Adrar (home of deposed President Ould Taya) and El-Hodh Es-Sharqi (home of Ould Taya's appointed Prime Minister Ould M'Barek). Ould Daddah obtained 333,184 votes and had a lead in his native Trarza (67.01 percent) as well as in the capital city Nouakchott (58.20 percent) and the province of Inchiri (52.18 percent). Though the political map emerging from the legislative and presidential elections seems reminiscent of

constitutional referendum, open the political system, legalize political parties, and give freedom to the press. The process began with the July 1991 constitution, which proclaimed "attachment to Islam and to the principles of democracy." However, the constitution accorded near despotic powers to the President of the Republic (Articles 28 to 43). The democratization process culminated in April 1992 with highly contested elections involving four presidential candidates. Colonel Ould Taya reportedly obtained 62.7 percent of the votes, Ahmed Ould Daddah (former minister of finance and half-brother of the first Mauritanian president, Mokhtar Ould Daddah) obtained 32.8 percent, and the remaining 4.5 percent was shared by Moustapha Ould Mohamed Salek (a retired army colonel and former president of the Military Committee of National Salvation that staged the coup against President Mokhtar Ould Daddah in 1978) and Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Mah (a Nouakchott University professor of economics and former mayor of Nouakchott).⁴¹

While the elections made Mauritania more credible in the eyes of its international financial benefactors, they also drove a wedge between the government and the opposition parties. Political factionalism along party, ethnic, Islamic, and tribal identities intensified to the extent that no unified or coordinated national policy or strategy could be identified and agreed upon. The number of recognized political parties increased from one in 1978, to 18 in 1993, and to 24 in 2005, about 30 when counting the banned parties. Marianne Marty argues that democratization in Mauritania was further undermined by the neopatrimonial nature of the political regime and its manipulation of ethnic and tribal divisions through control of state resources.⁴² In the face of the factionalism and impotence of political parties, serious and organized opposition within the military establishment became increasingly visible in June 2003 with an attempted coup. Its leader, former army Major Saleh Ould Hanenna, and his companions from the *fursan et-teghyir* (Knights of Change) organization admitted in court that they had wanted to end the Ould Taya regime. Overall, the constitution of 1991 and its multiparty democracy raised expectations before opening the door wide to political disappointment. People witnessed purges against various political factions (Islamist, Arab Nationalist, Negro-African, or Liberal), while Article 13 of the constitution reads: "All forms of moral or physical violence shall be proscribed." People witnessed the erosion of sovereignty over economic and foreign policies, while Article 2 of the constitution reads "The people shall be the source of all power," and "No partial or total surrender of sovereignty may be decided without the consent of the people." Under these critical circumstances of legitimacy and security crises, people began to lose faith in words and look for deeds at a time when the state was largely reduced to its repressive and relatively oversized security apparatus.

The political impasse must have encouraged the 20-year Director of the National Security, Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, and the Commander

of the Presidential Guard, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, and other military officers to mobilize on 3 August 2005 and overthrow President Ould Taya, who was out of the country attending the funeral of Saudi Arabia's King Fahd. They announced the establishment of the Military Council for Justice and Democracy (MCDJ) to put an end to "the despotic practices" of the regime and create favorable circumstances for an "open and transparent" democracy. In his first public address, a month after the bloodless coup, the President of the MCDJ, Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, declared a welcomed amnesty to "all Mauritians found guilty of political crimes or offences." However, the amnesty did not include all the detained Islamists, since it excludes the so-called Salafists, who continue to be jailed without trial as of April 2007.⁴³ The MCDJ also decreed that all its members and those of the new cabinet are barred from running for the legislative and presidential elections. Whatever the real motives and intentions of the MCDJ, one can argue that the recurrent coup attempts⁴⁴ by the military and the repeatedly disputing of elections by opposition parties indicate that the process of multiparty democracy has failed, not just Ould Taya or his party. But this failure does not seem to be acknowledged by Mauritania's Eurocentric political elites. It does not seem to encourage any serious critical thinking "outside the box" of representative democracy and its multiparty divisive technique. This seems to leave the door open for the vicious cycle of cliquish military committees (who often lack the required political theory and vision) and factious political parties (who often lack the necessary unity and strength) to start again from square one.

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the pre-coup balance of power, nothing is certain because of the endless making and unmaking of political parties, factions, coalitions, and alliances. The highly fragmented political elites and the widely distributed votes between nineteen presidential candidates and dozens of political parties and independent candidates confirm that no single party or candidate represents or can claim to "represent" the Mauritanian people.

One should not be naive regarding Mauritania's domestic politics, as they often reflect the country's geopolitics. Moreover, democratic relations at the local or national level will remain insufficient amid undemocratic geopolitical relations at the international level, as embodied in the undemocratic veto power within the UN Security Council and voting power within the IMF and the World Bank. It is worth mentioning in this context that while Mauritania's Military Council for Democracy has shown a great deal of determination to revisit many domestic policies (including amending the constitution and holding new elections), it has equally shown little determination to change any of Ould Taya's controversial geopolitical alliances, such as normalization with Israel and partnership in the "war on terror." The dominance of geopolitics over domestic politics was clear when the Military Council for Democracy and Justice dissolved the Mauritanian National Assembly but preserved Mauritania's commitment to all the international treaties and agreements which it has signed. It was also clear during the "historic" televised debate between presidential candidates Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi and Ahmed Ould Daddah. The candidates focused mostly on domestic issues and deliberately avoided important foreign affairs issues. The six topics debated were: (1) strengthening national unity,⁴⁶ (2) good governance and the rule of law, (3) struggle against poverty and for the well-being of citizens, (4) education, (5) economy and land management, and (6) external relations. Some of the "sensitive" domestic issues raised included the sequels of slavery, the question of Mauritanians deported to Senegal following the 1989 ethnic clashes, human rights abuses committed under the Ould Taya government, and administrative and financial corruption. However, the well-prepared debate did not include any questions on Mauritania's relations with Israel or Mauritania's position on the conflict over Western Sahara.

Historical Geopolitics of Mauritania

Unlike Mediterranean Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia, Mauritania falls mostly within the Sahara and straddles West Africa and the Maghreb. This significant position merits a brief presentation of the country's historical geopolitics before discussing the delicate geopolitical positioning of Mauritania in the context of the AMU, the Western Sahara conflict, the controversial relations with Israel, and the active collaboration in the US-led "war on terror." The Islamic Republic of Mauritania occupies a vast land area (1,030,700 km²) of the Sahara and Sahel regions along a lengthy

northwest African coastline (754 km) stretching northward from the delta of the Senegal River to the Nouadhibou Peninsula. The estimated population in 2006 was three million, with probably one-fourth living in the capital city of Nouakchott on the Atlantic coast. According to the 2006 UN Human Development Report, Mauritania's Human Development Index ranked 153 (Libya ranked 64, Tunisia 87, Algeria 102, and Morocco 123) among those of 177 countries listed.

Historically the country represents a strong link between the Maghreb and West Africa. The *murabitun* movement unified the Berber Zenega tribal confederations of central Mauritania in the eleventh century, conquered Morocco and founded Marrakech in 1056 AD, captured Ghana's capital, Koumbi Saleh in 1076, and intervened in al-Andalus in 1086, thus founding a short-lived (1053-1147) but vast Islamic trading empire linking West Africa, the Sahara, the Maghreb, and al-Andalus. Most Mauritanians refer to the *murabitun* as the founding fathers who completed the Islamization and began the country's Arabization. The process of ethno-linguistic Arabization accelerated after the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when several Arab tribal confederations, mostly known as Banu Maqil, were pushed south to Western Sahara by the Zenata Merinid dynasty in Morocco. By the end of the seventeenth century, several clans from the Hassan branch of Banu Maqil had penetrated and gradually overwhelmed the Zenega tribal confederations, after whom the Portuguese explorers of the fifteenth century had named the Senegal River (Zenega River).

This profound process of Islamization and Arabization constitutes the core of the dominant Arabic Moorish culture (with its distinct *Mahadhra* system, a sort of nomad universities focused on higher education in Quran and Arabic). For centuries, the Arabic culture interacted and lived in symbiosis with the Muslim communities of the Halpular, Soninke, Wolof, Bambara, and other black ethnic groups in and around the Senegal River basin and the great curve of the Niger River. The name *Mauritanie*, which was coined by the French at the turn of the twentieth century, was based on the names of ancient Roman colonies in North Africa (*Mauretania Caesariensis* in northwestern Algeria and *Mauretania Tingitana* in northern Morocco). It is derived from the Latin or Latinized word *Maurus* (a term which still lives in the names *Morocco* and *Mauritania*) from which came the French word *Maures* (Moors), which designates the dominant Arabic-speaking ethno-linguistic group in the country.

After the Treaty of Paris in 1814 and the Congress of Vienna in 1815, French colonial intentions north and south of the Sahara began with the reoccupation of Saint Louis (lost earlier to the British) at the mouth of the Senegal River in 1815 and the conquest of Algiers in 1830. In the aftermath of the 1885 Berlin Conference, the French concluded a draft agreement with Spain on the delimitation of Franco-Spanish possessions in the Peninsula of Nouadhibou in 1891 and conquered Timbuktu at the great curve of the Niger River in 1893. These geopolitical developments carved out what

would become Mauritania and made it part of colonial and post-colonial French geopolitics. The French viewed Mauritania as *le grand vide* (the great emptiness) or the *trait d'union* (hyphen) between their Algerian and Senegalese colonies or between the Arab Maghreb and West Africa. The vast geographical barrier of the Sahara, the French conquest and administration of Mauritania from Saint Louis in Senegal as part of French West Africa, and Morocco's (and consequently the Arab League's, excluding Tunisia) strong opposition to Mauritania's independence on 28 November 1960 alienated the country from the Arab world until the early 1970s. It was pushed deeper into West African regional politics and was highlighted as a geographical and cultural transition zone. This geopolitical position was also accentuated by lengthy northern and eastern boundaries which divided Moorish tribes in neighboring Western Sahara, Algeria, and Mali, similar to the southern boundaries dividing the Halpular, Soninke, Wolof, and other ethnic communities around the Senegal River basin. It is this complex historical geography that made Mauritania a geopolitical state par excellence.

Perhaps the most serious conflict affecting Mauritania's geopolitics today is the conflict over the former Spanish Sahara, which shares a long history and a porous border with Mauritania. The territory is sparsely populated, phosphate-rich, adjacent to some of the richest fishing waters in the world, and believed to have offshore oil deposits. Initially the conflict opposed the Algeria-backed Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia al-Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO Front) and Morocco, with the support of Mauritania. In 1979, Mauritania signed a peace treaty with the POLISARIO Front and gave up all claims over Western Sahara. The widely expected solution to the conflict is a free and fair referendum of self-determination, according to pertinent UN resolutions. Morocco continues to oppose such a referendum, the POLISARIO continues to insist on it, and the UN does not seem to be willing to impose it. The referendum is probably the only peaceful and face-saving exit for all parties involved in the 30-year fratricidal conflict, which continues to paralyze the Arab Maghreb Union. UN Security Council Resolution 1754 of 30 April 2007 once again extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 31 October 2007 and has once again reaffirmed the Security Council's "commitment to assist the parties to achieve a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in the context of arrangements consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations." Mauritania has learned a tough lesson from its involvement in the Western Saharan war from 1975 to 1979. Since then, successive Mauritanian governments have come to the conclusion that neutrality in the conflict is the best policy. In light of the spring 2007 Moroccan plan to give greater autonomy to Western Sahara, the Mauritanian position was again reiterated by the President of the MCJD, Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, when he stressed that Mauritania "is not a party to

this conflict" but will support any solution agreed upon by all parties.⁴⁷ The same position was paraphrased by the newly elected President, Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, when he said that Mauritania must have good relations with all its neighbors, particularly "Morocco, Algeria, and our Sahrawi brothers."⁴⁸

The other serious conflict affecting Mauritania's geopolitics today is the so-called "war on terror." Between 1995 and 1999, Mauritania broke ties with Iraq, established relations with Israel, and joined NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue countries. After 11 September 2001, the US and NATO became even more interested in Mauritania as a base for antiterrorist operations in the Sahara and North Africa. Former US ambassador to Mauritania Joseph LeBaron once portrayed the geopolitical basis of US-Mauritania relations in these terms: "we are deepening and expanding our relationship with this important country that is situated so strategically between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, with hundreds of miles of Atlantic Ocean coastline."⁴⁹ The US European Command came up with a USD 6m program, the Pan Sabel Initiative, to train and equip light infantry companies from Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. In 2005, the initiative was renamed the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative, and its funding was increased to USD 100m a year to train battalions from the following nine countries: Algeria, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia. Under the initiative, some 1,000 US troops, including 700 Special Operations Forces, will train 3,000 soldiers and provide them with vehicles, radios, uniforms, global-positioning devices, and fuel trailers. Perhaps in line with Stephen Krasner's idea of "shared" sovereignty, the initiative calls for assigning more military officers to US embassies in these countries, linking their militaries with secure satellites, and expanding military cooperation to other arenas. The US Justice Department would train local police, the Treasury Department would help develop financial controls, the Customs Department would assist with border security, and the Agency for International Development would construct local schools.⁵⁰ In this context, an armed group, believed to be the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), led a surprise attack against an isolated Mauritanian Army outpost (Lemghayti, near the border of Algeria) that killed 15 Mauritians in June 2005. This attack further exposed Mauritania's collaboration in the "war on terror." *The Wall Street Journal* of 1 March 2006 quoted Mauritania's ambassador in Washington both before and after the coup, Tijani Ould Mohamed El Kerim, as saying "Terrorists are not happy with the fact that Mauritania is among the three Arab countries to have diplomatic relations with Israel," and "They are not happy Mauritania is active in joining the war against terror."

There are some indications that Mauritania's collaboration in the "war on terrorism" is likely to continue under the presidency of Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. When he was asked about his position on US intention to establish a military base in Mauritania, he noted that terrorism

came to Mauritania from “the outside” and “our” fight against terrorism “will prompt us to cooperate and coordinate with the United States.”⁵¹ It should be noted that the US military are planning to have a fully operational US Africa Command (AFRICOM) to oversee military operations throughout the entire African continent (excluding Egypt, which will remain within the area of responsibility of the US Central Command) by 1 October 2007.⁵² President Bush called President-elect Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi to congratulate him, while he sent Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte the first-ever Director of National Intelligence, to represent him at Ould Cheikh Abdallahi’s inauguration on 19 April 2007.⁵³ Negroponte, who was leading a 32-strong delegation, including the deputy commander of US European Command, indicated that the United States will strengthen bilateral relations with Mauritania in the areas of food security, health, education, security, democracy, and terrorism.⁵⁴ The inauguration was attended by representatives from a number of countries and regional and international organizations, including the presidents of seven African countries (Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo), the prime minister of Morocco, the president of Algeria’s Council of the Nation, the Special Adviser to the Tunisian President, the Chief of Staff of the Libyan leader, and the French minister of defense.⁵⁵ It is quite remarkable to notice that while Arab media and political elites seem to have been widely thrilled by Mauritania’s transition and elections, no Arab head of state attended the inauguration of President Ould Cheikh Abdallahi.

Conclusion

Mauritania continues to face serious challenges in balancing geopolitics, improving political stability, strengthening social cohesion, and reducing poverty. The sensitive geographic location of the country requires even more sensitive geopolitics. For example, it is now clear that Mauritania’s full participation in the war in Western Sahara broke its geopolitical balance and ultimately brought down the Ould Daddah government in 1978, despite sustained military and political support from both France and Morocco. Similarly, the high-speed normalization with Israel and the full collaboration in the US-led “war on terror” again broke Mauritania’s geopolitical balance and led to the collapse of the Ould Taya government in 2005, despite strong support from Israel and the United States. The government elected in 2007 has a lot to learn from these unnecessary geopolitical ordeals, in order to pinpoint Mauritania’s optimal geopolitical position within Maghrebi, Arab, African, Islamic, and international geopolitics, without overrunning signals as did the governments of Ould Daddah and Ould Taya.

However, Mauritania’s political instability has been fueled not just by its geopolitics, but also by its failed political models and their lack of popular

and direct participation in the complex processes of defining policies, enacting laws, allocating resources, and waging war. First, Mauritania experienced the single-party rule of *hizb ash-shaah al-muritani* (Mauritanian People’s Party) from 1963 to 1978. The party, however, failed to represent the people when important decisions, such as intervening in the war in Western Sahara, were made by the politburo of the party without popular consultation and participation. Second, Mauritania was under the dictatorship of the Military Committee for National Recovery/Salvation from 1978 to 1992. The military came to power to stop a war they could not win and to put an end to the single-party rule that launched it. Somehow they succeeded in achieving these goals but could not move forward because of the lack of an appropriate political model and vision. Perhaps the most salient episode of the military dictatorship was Ould Haidalla’s *heyakil tehdhib al-jemahir* (Structures for Educating the Masses), which could be viewed as a sincere but theoretically uninformed political model of administration. Third, Mauritania experienced the despotism of *al-hizb al-jumhuri ad-dimuqrati al-ijtimai* (Democratic and Social Republican Party) and its “multiparty” ideology from 1992 to 2005. This ruling party also failed to represent the will of the people when it established diplomatic relations with Israel, joined the US-led “war on terror,” and shifted Mauritania’s weekend from Friday (the Muslim holy day) and Saturday to Saturday and Sunday without popular consent.

There is little doubt that the issue is still democracy. But the question is what kind of democracy, for whom, and by whom? The remaining contemporary political models of government that have not been implemented in Mauritania are: first, the single-family rule model in the eight Arab monarchies; second, the *wilayat al-faqih* rule model in Iran; third, the *Taliban* rule model in pre-11 September Afghanistan; fourth, the failed-state model in Yugoslavia or Somalia; and fifth, the *jamahiriyya* model in Libya. Given that Mauritania is an Islamic Republic, any preferred political model should be inspired by Islamic teachings, especially the kind of political participation implied in the principle of conducting public policy by mutual consultation,⁵⁶ the type of redistribution of wealth and income implied in the idea of spending that which is beyond one’s need,⁵⁷ and the code of morality and social cohesion implied in the ideals of tolerance and forgiveness.⁵⁸ It seems that unless the wide-ranging debate over “the government of national unity” is qualitatively transformed into another carefully and peacefully planned transition from representative to direct democracy, there is little evidence that the rule of the winning party (Ould Cheikh Abdallahi’s supporters are reportedly in the process of establishing a new political party) will be qualitatively different from the rule of *hizb ash-shaah al-muritani* or *al-hizb al-jumhuri ad-dimuqrati al-ijtimai* when it comes to the bottom line of a fair and genuine sharing of power, wealth, and weapons within an orderly society. The interesting question is: when will Mauritania’s political elites be *emotionally* confident, *intellectually* able, and *organizationally* prepared to

question traditional representative democracy and contemplate the prospect of a more direct form of democracy? The great North African thinker Ibn Khaldun observed 600 years ago that the followers of the Maliki School of Islamic Jurisprudence were more inclined toward "tradition" (*el-athar*) than toward "contemplation" (*en-nadhur*). Is not it time to prove him wrong?

Notes

- 1 Ould-Mey, 1994; 1995; 1996; 1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2003.
- 2 Ould-Mey, 1996.
- 3 George, 1992; Amin, 1990; Ould-Mey, 1996; Jessop, 1999; Sassen, 2003.
- 4 Jessop, 1999.
- 5 Krasner, 2005.
- 6 It could be argued that the *epistemological and political* ramifications of these sociological studies had impacted ethnic consciousness in Mauritania and could still impact national unity.
- 7 Ould-Mey, 1996, Table 6; p. 110.
- 8 IMF, 2006.
- 9 Ould-Mey, 2005.
- 10 Al-Jazeera.net English, 2005.
- 11 Ould-Mey, 2007 (forthcoming).
- 12 Cooper, 2000; *IslamOnline*, 2002; Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005.
- 13 *Ya'ari*, 2005.
- 14 *Al-Jazeera*, 16 October 2006.
- 15 Ould-Mey, 2007.
- 16 *Voice of America*, 11 April 2007.
- 17 *Al-Ahram*, 27 March 2007.
- 18 *Al-Akhbar*, 2007.
- 19 Ould-Mey, 2007.
- 20 Bianchi, 2005.
- 21 Osava, 2005; Lawrence, 2003; World Bank, 2005a; Amin, 2003.
- 22 World Bank, 2005a.
- 23 Kumar, 2005.
- 24 Brown, 2002.
- 25 Woodside, 2006.
- 26 *Oil & Gas Journal*, 2004; *Energy Economist*, 2005.
- 27 World Bank, 2007.
- 28 Vesely, 2004; Ford, 2003. Thousands of African migrants trying to escape poverty have drowned in recent years while attempting to reach European shores. In 2006 the European Commission adopted a package of measures to help Mauritania contain the flow of African illegal migrants to the Canary Islands. In April 2007 Spanish authorities announced that, for the first time, when their patrol boats tried to detain African migrants off the coast of Mauritania, the migrants threw Molotov cocktails at the patrol boats. Europa Press Release, 2006.
- 29 Ross, 2001.
- 30 World Bank, 2005b.
- 31 Ould-Mey, 2003: Table 4, p. 475.
- 32 Ould-Mey, 2003: p. 477; *Economist Intelligence Unit*, 2005; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005.
- 33 Al-Jazeera.net, 2005, 28 December 2005.
- 34 IMF, 2007b, 27 February 2007.
- 35 Ould-Mey, 2003.

- 36 IMF, 2007a, January 2007.
- 37 Ould-Mey, 1995; 1996, see Table 36, p. 217.
- 38 Ould-Mey, 1996.
- 39 It turned out later that the 15-year-old "nurse" (Nayirah al-Sabah) was actually the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the US and a member of the Kuwaiti royal family. Claiming she was a refugee volunteering in a hospital in Kuwait City, Nayirah tearfully testified before the US Congress in October 1990 about how the Iraqis threw 312 babies out of their incubators when they took over the hospital and shipped the incubators back to Baghdad. Eno, 2003; Beresford, 2003; Editorial Desk, 1992; Regan, 2002.
- 40 Nir, 2006.
- 41 Ould-Mey, 1996.
- 42 Marty, 2002.
- 43 *Al-Akhbar*, 9 April 2007.
- 44 In an interview with Al-Majalla (25 March 2007) reported by *Al-Akhbar* (6 April 2007) and *Eetaf* (2007). Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall cited the fear of "repeated coup attempts" as a main reason that motivated the coup of 3 August 2005.
- 45 *Chaab*, 27 March 2007.
- 46 This is a Mauritanian approach to other social and political reconciliation models such as the Algerian Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation (2005), the Moroccan Equity and Reconciliation Commission (2004), and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995).
- 47 Al-Jazeera.net, 2006.
- 48 *Al-Ahram*, 27 March 2007.
- 49 US Embassy, 21 April 2007.
- 50 Schmitt, 2005; Tyson, 2005.
- 51 *Al-Ahram*, 27 March 2007.
- 52 There seems to be some connection and concomitance between the establishment of AFRICOM and the announcement of the name change of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat to "the al-Qaeda organization in the Islamic Maghreb," whose members claimed responsibility for the deadly bomb attacks in Algiers on "4/11" (11 April 2007). French counterterrorism magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguière believes that the organization wants "to become a regional force, not solely an Algerian one." Smith, 2007.
- 53 *Sahara Media*, 2007.
- 54 *Agence Mauritanienne d'Information*, 19 April 2007.
- 55 *Al-Wikala Al-Muritaniya lilamba*, 19 April 2007.
- 56 Quran, 3:159; Quran, 42:38.
- 57 Quran, 2:219.
- 58 Quran, 7:199.